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Citation for published version:

Lamont, P 2016, 'Modern magic, the illusion of transformation and how it was done', *Journal of Social History*, vol. N/A, shw126, pp. 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shw126>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1093/jsh/shw126](https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shw126)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Social History

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Modern Magic, the Illusion of Transformation, and How It Was Done

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<Abstract>Abstract

In 1584, Reginald Scot claimed that jugglers who performed magic tricks were mistaken for witches. The claim was repeated, and later became the basis of the Victorian idea of “modern magic.” According to stage conjurors and writers on magic, “modern magic” was magic that was (now) understood to be an illusion. The claim continued to be repeated by amateur historians of magic, who reinforced this idea of “modern magic” by citing cases of early modern jugglers who were persecuted as witches. In recent years, “modern magic,” as a distinctly modern form of magic that was understood to be an illusion, has become part of modern cultural history.

The view that magic tricks were mistaken for witchcraft, however, is not to be found in the historiography of the early modern period. Indeed, it is a myth. When one examines how magic tricks and witchcraft were compared, one sees that there was a clear distinction made between the two. Nevertheless, despite the lack of evidence, the myth continued to survive. It was used to justify the exposure of secrets, enhanced Victorian conjurors’ respectability, and it fitted neatly within the modern narrative of rational progress. It persisted due to the uncritical reading of sources by some historians, whose examples of persecution were the result of misinterpretation. Thus, “modern magic,” as a form of magic that was understood to be an illusion, was not a particularly modern phenomenon. Indeed, despite some changes in how magic was experienced, early modern views of magic were remarkably similar to modern ones.

Introduction

In the early sixteenth century, Thomas Brandon killed a pigeon. Brandon was the king’s juggler, and he killed the pigeon in the following manner. He painted a picture of a dove on a wall, and pointed to a pigeon on top of a nearby roof. He then asked the king and his company to watch, as he stabbed the picture of the dove with a knife. The pigeon fell from the roof, “starke dead.”¹ This story appeared in Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), in which the author claimed that those who had witnessed Brandon’s feat had believed that it was real, and that this would still be the case. “If this, or the like feate should be done by an old woman,” Scot declared, “everie bodie would crie out for fier and faggot to burne the witch.”²

As we shall see, the claim that magic tricks were mistaken for witchcraft continued to be made in a variety of contexts. Following Scot, it appeared in books that revealed how magic tricks were done. In the nineteenth century, it was repeated by Victorian conjurors, and by the earliest historians of conjuring, who used it to construct the idea of “modern magic.” According to them, “modern magic” was understood to be an illusion, in contrast with the magic of the past, which had been thought to be real. Later amateur historians of conjuring reinforced the narrative of a transformation in how magic was seen, by citing evidence of earlier confusion, including examples of early modern jugglers who had been persecuted for witchcraft. In recent years, cultural historians have presented “modern magic” as a distinctly modern form of magic that was understood to be an illusion. However, the claim that early modern magic tricks were mistaken for witchcraft, and the narrative of “modern magic” that it supported, is incorrect.

This may not seem surprising to historians of the early modern period, who have long rejected the view that witchcraft beliefs reflected a less rational age.³ Such beliefs not only made sense in the context of wider contemporary religious, political, cultural and legal concerns, but also were bound up with early scientific thought. There was no simple boundary between magical beliefs and contemporary natural philosophy. ~~Although~~ ~~Demonologists~~ were more empirical, ~~they-and~~ had more in common with sceptics, than we previously thought.⁴ Indeed, early modern debates about extraordinary phenomena, from miracles to physical anomalies, were, like subsequent such debates, a means through which criteria for establishing facts could be constructed.⁵ In a variety of ways, magical beliefs throughout the early modern period were more complex, and less specific to the period, than traditional historical narratives have assumed.⁶ In the words of Malcolm Gaskill, “there was no avalanche of reason and disenchantment, rather a slowly evolving matrix of assertion, association, and meaning.”⁷ Within this more complex picture, assumptions about early

modern gullibility are deeply problematic.

Indeed, insofar as academic historians of the period have discussed the perception of magic tricks, they have not found a great deal of confusion. Keith Thomas briefly remarked that “the tricks performed for entertainment by conjurers and jugglers were sometimes suspected to involve diabolical aid,” while P. G. Maxwell-Stuart has stated that “[p]eople were perfectly capable of recognizing that not everything which appeared to be miraculous, preternatural, or demonic was actually so.”⁸ Comparisons between witchcraft and the tricks of jugglers were certainly made by contemporary commentators. As Stuart Clark has shown, references to juggling were a significant theme not only in debates about witchcraft but also in wider discussions that reflected growing uncertainty about visual perception.⁹ However, with the exception of Thomas’ brief comment, there is nothing to suggest that audiences regarded the tricks of jugglers as genuine magic.¹⁰

The lack of comment on such confusion reflects a lack of contemporary evidence. However, the topic nevertheless deserves further consideration. First, a lack of confusion is not a self-evident matter. Jugglers were performing magical effects, while concealing the *modus operandi*. In a context of widespread concerns about witchcraft, one might well expect such feats to be treated with suspicion. Since the debate about the reality of witchcraft often included references to magic tricks, there was certainly room for confusion. How, then, were magic tricks viewed in relation to witchcraft? Second, if there is no evidence to support it, then how and why did the myth survive? Third, those who have claimed that such confusion existed have cited evidence, including several examples of jugglers being persecuted for witchcraft, and these cases have never been examined.

This article, then, begins by making the explicit case that there is no evidence that early modern Europeans readily confused trickery and witchcraft. It considers how magic tricks and witchcraft were compared, and explains why, though there was certainly room for

confusion, such comparisons both reflected and reinforced a clear distinction between the two ~~even though there was certainly room for confusion~~. It describes how, despite the lack of evidence, the myth continued to survive in certain contexts. The myth could be used to justify the exposure of conjuring secrets, and to aid Victorian conjurors in their quest for respectability. More generally, it fitted all too easily within the wider narrative of progress from superstition to reason, and it persisted due to the uncritical reading of sources by some subsequent historians. The article also examines the cases of persecution that have been cited and shows how each was the result of misinterpretation. It concludes by arguing that “modern magic,” as a form of magic that was understood to be an illusion, was not a particularly modern phenomenon. On the contrary, though there were subtle changes in how magic was experienced, early modern views of magic were, in many respects, remarkably similar to modern ones.

Magic Tricks Viewed as Trickery

It is hard to find any evidence of early modern jugglers being persecuted for witchcraft.¹¹ In addition to his comment about Brandon’s pigeon, Reginald Scot referred to card tricks that were performed “to the wonder and astonishment of simple beholders, which conceive not that kind of illusion, but expect miracles and strange works.” Such rhetoric was part of his larger argument that “a naturall thing [can] be made to seeme supernaturall.”¹² In order to illustrate this point, Scot revealed how various magic tricks were done, but he provided no evidence of anyone mistaking magic tricks for witchcraft. Indeed, he had not even been present when Brandon performed the pigeon trick. He was merely reciting a story he had heard about something that had happened at least four decades earlier.¹³ Furthermore, even if we take the story at face value, Brandon was not persecuted. On the contrary, he was licensed by the king to entertain, was paid rather well for his services, and was even made a

Freeman of the City of London.¹⁴ Surely, if Scot had wished to show that innocent performers were being accused of witchcraft, then he could have found a better example.

However, this is not what Scot was trying to do. Scot's reason for explaining how magic tricks were done was not to show that people were taking them seriously, but to show that things might appear to be magical when they were not. He was also quite clear that juggling was harmless if the juggler stated that it was trickery; indeed, he commended jugglers who "always acknowledge wherein the art consisteth."¹⁵ This is a crucial distinction. On the one hand, there were people who, by deploying trickery and other natural means, pretended to have occult powers. These people, of course, might be accused of witchcraft. On the other hand, there were people who performed magic tricks as entertainment, and who were open about their use of trickery. The relevant question here is whether or not this latter group was being accused of witchcraft. Scot provided no evidence that this was the case. Neither did the early magic books that followed in his wake, which repeated his views almost verbatim, plagiarizing large chunks of his book.¹⁶

In 1655, Thomas Ady referred to "silly people" who thought that juggling tricks were the work of the devil.¹⁷ However, he only provided one example of any serious confusion: "there was a Master of Arts condemned only for using himself to the study and practice of the Jugling craft."¹⁸ This example, he explained, came from Scot's *Discoverie*. But the man to whom Scot had referred was not a performer of magic tricks; he was an occultist who had been condemned for practicing theurgy.¹⁹ Fellow sceptics of witchcraft echoed Scot's claim that gullible people mistook trickery for the real thing, but the examples that they gave were of individuals who used trickery to con folk out of money, or to fake bewitchment.²⁰ In other words, these were not entertainers either, but the kinds of deceivers who have long succeeded, and continue to succeed, in conning the public.

Meanwhile, it is not at all hard to find evidence that, throughout the early modern period, audiences did indeed understand that magic tricks were illusions. There were jugglers who made a living from performing outdoors, at fairs and markets, and sometimes indoors for more select company. Unless there was a well-established frame through which people could view their feats as tricks, this would have led to regular accusations of witchcraft, but this was not the case.²¹ Magic tricks could be bought in shops, and books were sold that explained how tricks were done.²² So far as these books referred to witchcraft, it was to make the distinction clearer. Even before Scot, there were texts that described how magic tricks were done in England, Germany, Italy and France. Alongside practical domestic advice, these books described how to do various tricks as an innocent form of diversion.²³ In the same year that Scot published *Discoverie*, Jean Prevost published *La premiere partie des subtiles et plaisantes inventions* (1584), which presented magic tricks as harmless fun.²⁴

The fact that people might be deceived by charlatans did not prevent the public from enjoying magic tricks as entertainment. This is why some jugglers were able to gain impressive reputations, such as William Vincent (a.k.a. Hocus Pocus) in England, Gonin in France, and Scoto (sometimes Scotto) in Italy.²⁵ They performed for the elite of society, and could hardly have done so if they had been suspected of witchcraft. Indeed, there are accounts of individuals who observed magic tricks, understood that they were illusions, and speculated on how they might be done. When Scoto entertained Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol in 1572, the court physician expressed his inability to figure out how the tricks were done, but there was no suggestion that it was due to witchcraft.²⁶ Girolamo Cardano described the “incredible tricks” of a young Neapolitan man, and confessed how he and others were unable to discover what was going on, but concluded that they were all due to “skill in the art of legerdemain.”²⁷ Later, Francis Bacon recalled seeing a card trick, which he had discussed with a learned man. Bacon had suggested that it might be due to confederacy, while the

learned man had suggested that the juggler had used a psychological ruse. There was no mention of the possibility of witchcraft.²⁸

It was not merely intellectuals who made the distinction. Throughout the early modern period, magic tricks, including some described by Scot, were being used as theatrical effects. As Philip Butterworth has described in detail, actors were being stabbed, hanged and decapitated on stage, and these effects were designed to be convincing.²⁹ Audiences did not protest, or run from the theatre in fear. On the contrary, these effects were used because they attracted the public. For this reason, sometimes they were added, even when they were unnecessary to the plot, and so provided a form of entertainment that might be independent of the play itself.³⁰ These magical effects were being used to entertain a public who were perfectly aware that they were watching illusions, even when they did not know how they were done. There is, then, clear evidence of a well-established frame through which magic tricks were viewed as nothing more than trickery.

Nevertheless, comparisons were often made between magic tricks and witchcraft, which meant that there was room for confusion. And, as we shall see, from the nineteenth century, some certainly felt that this had been the case. However, when we consider the nature of the comparisons, we can see not only that there was a clear contemporary distinction made between magic tricks and witchcraft, but also why a modern reader might think that there was not.

Magic Tricks and Witchcraft Compared

Early modern writers often compared magic tricks with witchcraft. However, this was because, like Scot, they were trying to make a point about the reality of witchcraft. In doing so, they used the tricks of jugglers as both metaphorical and explanatory devices. The devil was often compared to a “juggler,” as one who engaged in deception and illusion, and

jugglers' tricks were used to illustrate how diabolical illusions might deceive the senses.³¹ At the level of metaphor, they served as a means to make feats of witchcraft easier to comprehend. In that sense, like descriptions of natural magic, they could help the reader find the idea of real magical phenomena more plausible.³²

However, the idea that magic tricks were the result of diabolical processes was not a theme. Rather, magic tricks were used by both demonologists and sceptics as a way to argue, respectively, for and against the reality of witchcraft. One of the ways to deny the reality of witchcraft was to argue, like Scot, that it was no more real than the tricks performed by jugglers. Most demonologists, on the other hand, argued that witchcraft was real, *unlike* the tricks performed by jugglers. Thus, even the *Malleus Maleficarum* distinguished between witchcraft and the kind of "human prestidigitatory art" that "can be done without devils, since it is artificially done by the agility of men who show things and conceal them, as in the case of the tricks of conjurers and ventriloquists."³³

In doing so, terms were used that might suggest to a modern reader that there was confusion. Thus, for example, "juggling" and "illusion" might be used in reference to the work of the devil, but authors made distinctions between juggling and illusions that involved evil spirits and those that relied on sleight of hand.³⁴ William Perkins, for example, defined "juggling" in a way that was broad enough to include diabolical delusions that were beyond nature, yet he also noted that "divers men, by reason of the agilitie of their bodies, & sleight of their hands, are able to work divers feats, which seem strange to the beholders, and yet not meddle with Witchcraft."³⁵ Thus, while it might be said that the Devil engaged in "juggling," this did not mean that a trick performed by a juggler was seen as diabolical. On the contrary, the tricks of jugglers were cited as familiar real-world examples of a different kind of magic (or a different kind of "juggling"), one that was not real. It was precisely because they were

generally understood to be the product of trickery that they could be used to illustrate such distinctions.

While making such a distinction in principle, the question remained over whether or not particular cases might be explained by trickery. Throughout the debate, both sides naturally relied on Scripture in support of their claims. In short, if witchcraft was in the Bible, then it could be considered to be real, so proponents claimed that witches were in the Bible, while sceptics argued that they were not. For example, sceptics, argued that the resurrection of Samuel by the Witch of Endor was trickery.³⁶ Scot, for one, claimed that the resurrection had been an illusion that relied on ventriloquism.³⁷ Some also disputed the Egyptian magicians in Exodus, who had tried to copy the miracles of Moses and Aaron by transforming rods into serpents, turning water into blood, and making frogs appear. Sceptics, such as Scot and Ady, denied that this was witchcraft, arguing instead that it was a piece of juggling.³⁸ Indeed, some sceptics even suggested how it might have been done. John Webster, for example, claimed that the rod went up the sleeve, and was substituted by a fake serpent, made from linen and animated by wire. “As for the changing water into blood, and the producing of Frogs,” he continued, “they were so easy to be done after the same manner, that they need not any particular explication.”³⁹ If this explanation sounds rather vague, it was no more convincing to demonologists. Joseph Glanvill, for example, wondered how “those jugglers should know what signs Moses and Aaron would shew and accordingly furnish themselves with counterfeit Serpents, Blood and Frogs ... or had they those always in their pockets? If not, it was great luck for them that Moses and Aaron should shew those very miracles.”⁴⁰

Nevertheless, even those who argued for the reality of witchcraft made a place for harmless juggling. “As if a merry Juggler who plays tricks of Legerdemain at a Fair or Market,” wrote Henry More in 1678, “were such an abomination to either the God of *Israel*,

or to his Law-giver *Moses*; or as if an Hocus Pocus so wise a wight as to be consulted as an Oracle.²⁴¹ Comparisons between witches and jugglers, then, could be used to contrast innocent tricks with the dangerous reality of witchcraft.⁴² While jugglers' trickery could challenge the reality of witchcraft by being cited as an alternative explanation, some argued it inadequately explained away the reality of witchcraft. In any case, it was widely agreed that Biblical miracles were real and that there were magic tricks that relied on sleight of hand. In that sense, as in others, the views of witch-hunters and witch-sceptics were not so far apart.⁴³

Some, however, suggested that jugglers were in league with the devil. They did not doubt that jugglers performed tricks, but claimed that this was not all that they did. There had always been those who mistrusted jugglers and who, rightly or wrongly, associated them with charlatans and mountebanks. In the context of the witchcraft debate, however, Satan was suspected of being the source of all manner of delusions and deceptions, so where there was deception, the devil might not be far away. Jean Bodin, for example, claimed that jugglers often became witches and that they performed tricks alongside feats of genuine magic in order to lull people into believing that these feats were merely tricks.⁴⁴ The mixture of truth and fiction was referred to by John Foxe, who wrote that "certayn persons fitte to doe mischiefe, do publish abroad as it were the sugred tast of hony mixt with poyson, therby the soner to be taken: working and causing through their slight and subtiltyes, that errour should be taken for veritye."⁴⁵ Martin Del Rio picked up on Bodin's point, that jugglers usually mixed magic tricks with genuine magic, in order to persuade people that "whatever witchcraft they mix in may seem to be the result of subtilty and agility;" as a result, the audience could be "enticed into absurd joy and astonishment and account everything mere fun and not something which ought to be punished."⁴⁶ It was said of Bornelio Feats that he "mixed diabolical assistance with trickery to make his wickedness less suspected."⁴⁷

According to Reginald Scot, Feats was not only a juggler but also a witch, who sold familiars

and consultations under another name.⁴⁸ As far as Scot was concerned, he had no actual magical powers, but was a charlatan who exploited others. In addition to having great skill with playing cards, he was known for conning people out of money.⁴⁹ This is, no doubt, precisely the sort of person who used sleight-of-hand, and other kinds of trickery, in order to pretend to have genuine magical powers. However, in this case, he was suspected of using trickery to *conceal* magical powers.⁵⁰

So, while it was generally agreed, in principle, that there were magic tricks that did not rely on diabolical means, some suspected that those who performed them might also indulge in witchcraft. This would seem to be an obvious reason why jugglers might be persecuted for being witches, yet this was not the case. Alternatively, it might seem to be, at the very least, reason for confusion. Indeed, it was on this basis that Keith Thomas stated that some tricks of jugglers were suspected of involving diabolical aid.⁵¹ Perhaps some people did indeed observe a juggler performing tricks, and suspected that some of his feats were aided by the devil. After all, the occasional attribution of a magic trick, performed as entertainment, to some form of genuine magic, has remained a well-known phenomenon.⁵² However, they could not have been typical of the period, since the very idea - that mixing trickery and witchcraft was a way to conceal the latter - rested on the assumption that the audience would think that they were simply watching tricks. The very idea assumed that the public regarded the feats of jugglers as mere trickery.

Comparisons between magic tricks and witchcraft, then, both reflected and reinforced a normative mentality that distinguished clearly between the two. Despite the lack of evidence, however, the view that early modern audiences struggled to do this was common throughout the nineteenth century, continued to be voiced in amateur histories of conjuring throughout the twentieth century, and appeared most recently in the cultural history of “modern magic.” This, then, begs the question, how did the myth survive?

The Persistence of the Myth

For at least two centuries after Scot, the claim was repeated by authors of books that revealed how magic tricks were done. This served a useful rhetorical purpose, as it provided a justification for the exposure of jugglers' tricks of the trade and presented the authors' work as having broader relevance than might appear to be the case.⁵³ Indeed, such a strategy could be found in books that did not draw upon Scot. In France, Jean Prevost justified exposing the secrets of conjuring as part of an attempt to educate an ignorant public about the dangers of deception and self-deception, thus presenting his work as "useful to the public."⁵⁴ In the late eighteenth century, this argument was an ideal fit with the notion of "rational recreations."⁵⁵ Later, when the first histories of conjuring appeared in the nineteenth century, they cited these earlier sources as evidence that previous generations had mistaken magic tricks for witchcraft.⁵⁶

By then, such a view seemed entirely plausible. Indeed, in the early eighteenth century, beliefs in magic and witchcraft were already being seen as an anachronism in the 'Age of Enlightenment.'⁵⁷ However, it became an increasingly prominent theme that such beliefs had been held in the past, and that now they were seen as irrational. Throughout the nineteenth century, this theme ~~expanded-could be found~~ beyond the obvious contexts, such as discourses about natural magic and spiritualism, ~~and into~~ the popular press.⁵⁸ With the growing influence of evolutionary thought, past societies were increasingly taken to be naturally more primitive than modern ones. Victorian psychologists and anthropologists regarded magical beliefs as relics of the distant past, and their survival as evidence of insufficient advancement.⁵⁹ Folklorists and orientalists found evidence of such relics elsewhere, beyond the urban west, in rural areas and colonial India.⁶⁰ Within this wider narrative, modern audiences could watch a magic trick, and understand that it was trickery,

while imagining how their primitive ancestors would have been less rational than them. They could hear how colonial subjects, in India or Africa, still believed that such things were real.⁶¹

The portrayal of others as irrational or credulous was hardly new, nor was it an accusation reserved for those in the past. However, throughout the nineteenth century, it became a core theme of what it meant to be modern, as part of the narrative of the progressive development of Western society from superstition to reason. In the process of constructing a modern narrative of progress, whether romantic or rationalist, there was no reason to question the idea that magic tricks were once mistaken for witchcraft. The view expressed by Reginald Scot was also expressed by Walter Scott, who claimed that “the common feats of jugglers, or professors of legerdemain” were “wonders at which in our fathers' time men would have cried out either sorcery or miracles.”⁶² Three generations later, in Lecky's *History of the rise and influence of the spirit of rationalism in Europe (1913)*, Reginald Scot was still being praised for his enlightened exposure of “juggling tricks that were ascribed to the devil.”⁶³

The theme was reinforced by Victorian conjurors, who had their own agenda. In their bid for greater respectability, which provided not only increased social status but also financial rewards, Victorian conjurors regularly stressed the modern and scientific nature of magic by demonstrating chemical and optical processes, exhibiting mechanical marvels and preaching that conjuring was based on scientific principles.⁶⁴ In word and deed, they debunked modern spiritualism, often denounced as a modern form of witchcraft, and frequently stressed that their own kind of magic was for modern, rational audiences.⁶⁵ “The time is quite gone by when people really believe that conjuring is to be done by supernatural agencies,” declared the Victorian conjuror, Colonel Stodare. He argued, “the audience are clearly aware that no more is assumed to be presented to them than a very striking illusion.”⁶⁶

Indeed, Victorian magicians often presented themselves as agents of rational change. Signor Blitz, for example, noted that earlier generations “had not the penetrating powers of the present day,” and claimed that his “exhibitions were of a nature calculated to remove the long-prevailing impressions attached to the history of magic.”⁶⁷ As the magician, Edwin Sachs, declared, “there are now very few people who attribute the successes of a conjuror to any other agency than his own skill.”⁶⁸ The theme could also be found more widely in reviews of conjuring shows that remarked how, if such illusions had been performed in the past, the magician would have been burnt at the stake.⁶⁹

It was in this context of a narrative of progress that the earliest histories of conjuring emerged, which repeated similar themes as they contrasted the magic of past and present. Thomas Frost’s *Lives of the Conjurors* (1876) referred to conjuring tricks in an age of “partial and feeble mental illumination” that was lacking “the light of modern science,” when “many, even among the educated and better informed, regarded as real what the least educated spectator of the present day would know to be illusory.”⁷⁰ He complained about the “persecution of conjurors” in this period, blaming it on the ubiquity of weak-minded people who were “ready to declare that such things could be done only by the aid of the devil.”⁷¹ In *Ancient and Modern Magic* (1879), Arprey Vere contrasted “our forefathers,” who “flew to the aid of diablerie and the supernatural for an elucidation of the mystery,” with the present age, “which is distinguished for its matter-of fact treatment of all that appears mysterious and unusual ... and banished, or almost banished, those dread preventives of progress and civilization.”⁷² “We believe,” declared Paul Carus, in his introduction to H. R. Evans’ *The Old and the New Magic* (1909), that “the spread of modern magic and its proper comprehension are an important sign of progress.”⁷³ This new magic, which he explicitly described as the product of evolution, had “originated from the old magic when the belief in

sorcery began to break down in the eighteenth century,” and was “accomplished with the help of science and without the least pretense of supernatural powers.”⁷⁴

The idea that magic tricks had been mistaken for witchcraft, however, remained entirely without support. Frost repeated the claims of Scot and Ady, but his only example was of “a juggler [who] was, in the reign of Elizabeth, condemned as a wizard, and would have been pilloried but for the interposition of the Earl of Leicester.”⁷⁵ The juggler to whom Frost referred was, in fact, the same man who had been cited by Thomas Ady, and who had been described by Scot as an occultist, not an entertainer.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, despite the lack of evidence, these early histories managed to provide an impression of a shift in the perception of magic. The story of magic told by Frost was a mixture of references to ancient religion, magic tricks, and the occult until the eighteenth century, after which it became a more focused story about modern stage magic. Evans also included references to ancient priests and the occult in his brief coverage of the period before the eighteenth century when magic was finally “shorn of its charlatanism.”⁷⁷ Such a shift in focus gave the impression that magic tricks, prior to the eighteenth century, had been confused with genuine magic.

The Discovery of Witchcraft Accusations

Subsequent amateur historians of conjuring, who were familiar with this narrative, not only continued in a similar vein, but also added alleged examples of early modern conjurors who were persecuted. The most important of these was Sidney Clarke who, in his lengthy *Annals of Conjuring*, published from 1924 to 1928, sought to describe the “beginnings, progress and modern development of that branch of the art of entertaining.”⁷⁸ In doing so, though he criticized earlier historians of magic for confusing different kinds of magic. He continued to express the view that “until comparatively modern times, everything uncommon, everything that could not be accounted for by known and familiar means, was

attributed to a diabolical origin.”⁷⁹ In support of this claim, Clarke described a girl who, in the fifteenth century, had been charged with witchcraft in Cologne: she had “torn a handkerchief into pieces and immediately afterwards produced it whole and entire; surely a sleight of hand trick.” “In 1571,” he continued, “a juggler who did card tricks in Paris was imprisoned on a charge of witchcraft.” He also cited the case of Triscalinus, who had performed before Charles IX of France: when he caused finger rings to fly through the air, “the company rose against him and compelled him to confess Satanic aid!”⁸⁰

Clarke provided no sources for these claims, but it seems clear from the content and form that the main source was an essay by Richard Cumberland, published in 1823.⁸¹ The original source of the story about the girl in Cologne, however, is Johannes Nider’s *Formicarius*. This had been published in 1475, but had been completed before Nider’s death in 1438. According to Nider, he had been told the story by Brother Heinrich Kalteisen. Kalteisen, an inquisitor, had heard it from people in Cologne.⁸² In other words, even the original source is a third-hand account. Furthermore, even if we take the original source at face value, the Cologne girl was no street entertainer, but a young woman who claimed that she was Joan of Arc, resurrected by God. When two parties were disputing the jurisdiction of the church, she boasted that she could secure the French throne for one of them. She carried weapons, drank excessively and dressed in men’s clothing. Since this woman claimed to have been raised from the dead, she quite possibly claimed to possess magical powers. Indeed, this may even have been why she resurrected the torn napkin and the broken glass. Nevertheless, whatever claims she might have made, about the tricks that she might have performed, the tricks were described by Nider as “frivolities,” while there are clearly other reasons for her arrest.⁸³

Clarke’s next example was the “juggler” who, according to him, was imprisoned for performing card tricks in Paris in 1571. He was subsequently cited, by other amateur

historians of magic, as an example of how innocent performers were persecuted for witchcraft.⁸⁴ While none of them provided sources, the origin of the story is probably the second edition of Jean Bodin's *Demonomanie*, who mentions a sorcerer by the name of Trois-eschelles.⁸⁵ The 'trick' involved a deck of cards, but it was hardly a conventional card trick. In 1571, according to Bodin, the sorcerer accosted a priest in front of his parishioners. He accused the priest of being a hypocrite, who pretends to carry a breviary, but actually carries a pack of cards. When the priest tried to show that he was carrying a breviary, he discovered what seemed to be a pack of cards, and others present thought this too. The priest then threw it away, and left confused. However, when some others picked up what he had thrown away, they discovered that it was a breviary after all. Bodin describes this as an illusion, in the sense that it did not really happen: the sorcerer had dazzled the eyes of the people, but only the people who had been there from the start experienced the illusion; those who arrived later only saw a breviary.⁸⁶

In other words, this seems to be a story about an induced hallucination, which relies on diabolical powers to deceive people into thinking that a holy book has transformed into something rather more profane. Like later stories about mass hallucination, it suggests that if you arrive after the induction period, you will not see anything happen. This kind of magic was discussed by others at the time, and linked to satanic powers.⁸⁷ However, this is not a card trick performed by a contemporary street entertainer. Furthermore, we are told that the sorcerer was condemned for a quite different feat (which, as we shall see shortly, does not sound like a magic trick either). He was not executed, but pardoned by the king, on condition that he revealed the names of fellow sorcerers. This may be an example of persecution, but it does not appear to be an example of being persecuted for performing a magic trick.

Part of the problem is what is lost, or perhaps gained, in translation. This is the case with Clarke's final example, Triscalinus, who was supposedly condemned for making finger

rings fly through the air. Clarke had got this from Cumberland's 1823 article, who had got it from Bodin.⁸⁸ In the French original, Bodin described a sorcerer, who had demonstrated a feat in front of Charles IX of France: it seemed as if the sorcerer had caused several links of a gentleman's gold chain to appear in his hands, but later the chain was found to be in one piece. In the process of translating this into Latin, "links" had been transformed into "rings," which were then assumed to be "finger rings," and finger rings (like a pack of cards) are the kinds of things with which magicians do tricks. However, in the original, this sounds no more like a contemporary magic trick than the 'card trick' described above. Perhaps more importantly, the man called Triscalinus (in Latin) had been called, in the original French, Trois-eschelles. Due to the translation, it had not been noticed that this was the very same sorcerer who had (seemingly) turned a breviary into a pack of cards in 1571. In other words, in the process of translation, not only the quality but also the quantity of evidence was exaggerated.

Nevertheless, subsequent amateur historians of magic continued to find evidence of persecution. Milbourne Christopher's popular *Illustrated History of Magic* (1973) repeated the claim that it was because "many people thought sleight-of-hand men needed the devil's help with their tricks [that] Scot decided to set them straight."⁸⁹ In doing so, Christopher described another alleged victim, a magician called Reatius who, after performing in Mantua and Padua, was "seized and tortured until he admitted he produced his deceptions with sleight of hand and the help of confederates."⁹⁰ According to Christopher, this was an example of a conjuror "who claimed no demonic powers."⁹¹ Christopher's unnamed source is presumably (directly or indirectly) Johannes Weyer's *De praestigiis demonum* (1563), which refers to a conjuror who was seen at Mantua and Padua, was seized by the inquisition, and confessed that he used trickery.⁹² Weyer, in turn, was clear about his source, which was a book by Pietro Pomponazzi, the Renaissance scholar at the University of Padua, published around

1520. In the original source, Reatius is certainly not described as a conjuror “who claimed no demonic powers.” On the contrary, he is described as someone who practiced divination, and who cheated when he did. There is nothing to suggest that Reatius performed magic tricks as entertainment, only that he used trickery to pretend that he had clairvoyant powers.⁹³

In other words, there remained no evidence that performers of magic tricks, as opposed to those who pretended to have genuine powers, were persecuted as witches.⁹⁴ The claim was based, rather ironically, on mistaking one kind of magic for another. Nevertheless, it continued to give the impression that early modern audiences struggled to distinguish between magic tricks and witchcraft, and that “modern magic” was, in this sense, a different kind of magic. As we have seen, this has not been a view that has been reflected in academic early modern history. However, it has recently become a theme in modern cultural history.

A Modern Kind of Magic?

Several cultural historians have examined how modern forms of enchantment – such as mesmerism, spiritualism, psychical research and modern forms of occultism – continued to be intrinsically bound up with wider social, cultural and, indeed, scientific views.⁹⁵ In the midst of this, some scholars have presented “modern magic” as a form of disenchanted magic, in which modern audiences could now engage with magic as fiction rather than as fact.⁹⁶ According to James Cook, “modern magic” was an “explicitly disenchanted post-Enlightenment form of entertainment,” having transformed from a “somewhat shady and morally suspect form of realism to a more self-conscious and respectable mode of illusionism.”⁹⁷ “From about 1700,” Simon During explains, “magic slowly became disconnected from supernature;” unlike the “old magic” of the supernatural, “modern magic” was secular and natural: it was a kind of fiction, in which people suspended disbelief, but in which they did not believe.⁹⁸ This involved, in the words of Michael Saler, “a rational

process that stimulated the sense of wonder while honing cognitive skills that could prevent beguilement;” as a result, it could “delight one’s reason and imagination without deluding them.”⁹⁹ This ability to “delight but not delude,” to be deceived without believing it is real, has been seen as a “distinctly modern form of enchantment,” and linked to “distinctively modern cognitive repertoires ... audiences must be willing to be deceived but not so credulous as to mistake illusions for reality.”¹⁰⁰ As Graham Jones further explains: “modern magic requires audiences to implement a culturally specific interpretative repertoire – indulging in awe but imagining naturalistic explanations for the magician’s effects.”¹⁰¹

In other words, while it may be obvious to us today that this is how we experience magic tricks, in the full awareness that they are illusions and that we are being tricked, the claim here is that there is something specifically modern about it. This, then, is a diluted version of the claims of earlier amateur historians. It suggests that, in the modern period, we began to view magic tricks differently: now they could delight us rather than delude us, as we suspended our disbelief about magic, rather than believing that it was real. The context, of course, is different. The aim, according to the most important of these histories, Simon During’s *Modern Enchantments*, is to demonstrate the cultural significance of “secular magic,” by which he means magic that “stakes no serious claim to contact with the supernatural.” In presenting this as a modern form of enchantment, which emerged from the eighteenth century, he draws on Coleridge’s notion of a “willing suspension of disbelief.”¹⁰²

However, in certain respects, the book reflects earlier amateur histories of magic.¹⁰³ It provides an impression of a shift in the perception of magic in the eighteenth century, in its discussion of references to occult magic prior to this period. For example, we are told what Seneca the Younger, Augustine, and Francis Bacon wrote about occult magic, but not what they said about magic tricks.¹⁰⁴ However, Seneca the Younger also referred to the juggler’s “cup and dice,” and how the trickery pleased him.¹⁰⁵ Augustine described how people “watch

carefully and pay close attention to the conjurer, who freely acknowledges that he uses nothing but trickery.”¹⁰⁶ Bacon describes juggling tricks as forms of deception in several places, including his account of the card trick above, which he thought was the result of confederacy.¹⁰⁷ Whatever these individuals wrote about occult magic, they described magic tricks as the product of trickery.

Nevertheless, During suggests an early modern difficulty in distinguishing between jugglers and occult magic. In doing so, he provides two examples of individuals who “did not distinguish between occult and entertainment magic in the way we do today.”¹⁰⁸ One is Thomas Nashe who, in a fictional tale, made a casual comparison of Scoto to Cornelius Agrippa, but did not claim that Scoto performed real magic. The other is King James who, according to During, accused Scoto of having diabolical assistance. However, James did not actually make such an accusation. He used Scoto as an example of a juggler, who deceived the senses with juggling tricks.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, around the same time, “an Italian juggler” performed for James’ son.¹¹⁰ Whether or not this was Scoto himself, he was presumably not suspected of being in league with the devil. Indeed, this may have been the same “Italian” who had recently performed magic for Elizabeth I, and who had been paid handsomely for his “wonderful tricks upon the cards.”¹¹¹ Following the royal performance, he was engaged by other respectable folk, all of whom, like James, were clearly capable of distinguishing between occult and entertainment magic.

There is, then, no reason to think that “modern magic,” as a form of magic that audiences explicitly viewed as an illusion, and imagined how it might be done, was particularly modern. In this case, the confusion has come from drawing on literary theory, rather than on evidence, particularly the assumption that a “willing suspension of disbelief” is a useful lens through which one can understand how magic is viewed. Magic, however, does not rely on a willing suspension of disbelief.¹¹² Rather, it depends on audiences believing one

aspect of it, while disbelieving another. On the one hand, certain actions of the performer are supposed to be believed by the audience. They are supposed to be convinced that the selected card is genuinely lost, or that the box is really empty, otherwise there can be no magical effect. On the other hand, the audience is not supposed to believe that other elements of the performance are real. When the magician waves a wand, or says “hocus pocus,” the audience is not supposed to think that this is really how it works. Modern audiences understand this, but so did early modern audiences. What the evidence shows is that, for centuries, jugglers have said “hocus pocus,” and have waved their magic wands, and audiences have understood that they were watching a trick.

There have, of course, been a variety of changes in how magic tricks have been experienced. For example, new venues provided a context of increased respectability, and allowed for the use of new and more elaborate technology, and grander sets, for larger audiences.¹¹³ Conjurors often tapped into contemporary concerns, such as the phenomena of spiritualism, the mystic East or, in the case of sawing a woman in half, women’s suffrage.¹¹⁴ They adapted to new forms of media, by performing mind-reading tricks on radio and ‘close-up’ tricks on television, and by exploiting such contexts to use novel techniques that would not have worked with a live audience.¹¹⁵ There was also a broader but subtler change in how magic was experienced. From the late sixteenth century, a growing number of books were published that revealed how magic tricks were done and, from the late nineteenth century, these became significantly more detailed, and included descriptions of how magicians “misdirected” their audiences. Such exposure continued throughout the twentieth century, in an increasing number of popular books, on television and the internet. As such knowledge was increasingly disseminated, it became possible to observe a magic trick while imagining a larger number of ways in which it might be done, and with a greater awareness that the magician was playing with one’s mind.¹¹⁶

All of this naturally reflected wider changes in society, but the core experience of magic remained essentially the same: it was of a seemingly impossible effect that one understood to be an illusion. The public may have become more aware of how magic tricks were done, but magicians responded by developing new physical and psychological techniques, so that they could continue to present illusions that seemed impossible. Such techniques, of course, could also be used to pretend to have psychic, supernatural or, more recently, psychological abilities, and these have continued to convince many.

Conclusion

In contrast with recent cultural history, then, this article has stressed continuity in how a particular kind of magic has been seen. Indeed, it is this very continuity that has allowed magic tricks to serve a variety of rhetorical purposes across different historical contexts. Since at least the sixteenth century, they have been used to argue both for and against the reality of genuine magic, and to illustrate the fallibility of our vision and our vulnerability to deception. In the early modern period, this was in relation to particular contemporary concerns about the reality and dangers of witchcraft and increasing uncertainty about the reliability of vision, though they had been used as examples of the fallibility of vision since Plato.¹¹⁷

As for their role in the debate about witchcraft, it was often surprisingly similar to modern debates about different kinds of magic. As demonologists constructed different categories of magic, they provided a variety of options that one could take in relation to a particular case, and what is striking to anyone familiar with modern debates about psychic phenomena is how familiar the options seem. The option of trickery could serve as a natural explanation or could be rejected as an inadequate explanation. A delusion could serve as a natural explanation or could be attributed to a supernatural source. The view that some

individuals mixed trickery with the real thing was frequently expressed in the nineteenth century about mesmerists and spiritualist mediums, and it has continued to be said about almost every famous psychic since.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, there were always people who mistook trickery for the real thing, since trickery was used to deceive in different ways. Clearly there were those who used sleight of hand to cheat with cards and dice, and to con the public with ‘fast and loose’. There were mountebanks who sold ineffective ointments by pretending to be wounded, and then pretending to be healed.¹¹⁹ And, of course, there were individuals who pretended that they had genuine magical powers. However, trickery has continued to be used by con artists, fake healers, and pseudo-psychics, and many people continue to be deceived. Whether this happens, at any given time, has always depended on a variety of factors, so much so that even modern scientists and sceptics have mistaken trickery for the real thing.¹²⁰ While one should not exaggerate the similarities, of course, one can nevertheless see notable continuities in how we have tried to separate one kind of magic from another.

In terms of magic tricks themselves, however, the continuity argument is simpler. The venues, costumes, and sets may have changed, the audiences and illusions may have grown, and the degree of respectability may have risen, along with the price of admission. However, centuries before the rise of “modern magic,” whatever other magical beliefs might have been in play, our ancestors were able to recognize magic tricks as a form of entertainment, understand that they were illusions, and wonder how they were done. The claim that they mistook them for genuine magic was originally deployed for rhetorical purposes, and was later taken at face value, in the context of various modern attempts to separate one kind of magic from another. The historical narratives of past credulity that were constructed, then, far from being a reflection of early modern gullibility, were actually part of a modern struggle to distinguish between different kinds of magic.

Endnotes

¹ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), 174-5. On the book and its general reception, see: Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and "The Discoverie of Witchcraft"* (London, 2011); S.F. Davies, "The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74 (2013): 381-401.

² Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 174-5.

³ Two seminal works in this shift of thinking were Hugh Trevor-Roper's "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in his *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London, 1967), and Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971).

⁴ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, 1985); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997); P. Elmer, "Science, Medicine and Witchcraft," in Johnathon Barry and Owen Davies (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography* (Basingstoke, 2007), 33-51.

⁵ Peter Dear, "Miracles, Experiments and the Ordinary Course of Nature," *Isis* 81 (1990): 663-683; Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 93-124; Palmira Fontes da Costa, "The Making of Extraordinary Facts: Authentication of Singularities of Nature at the Royal Society of London in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 33 (2002): 265-288. On more recent debates about extraordinary phenomena as an arena in which criteria for establishing facts were constructed, see: Peter Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁶ Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2004); Karl Bell, *The Magical Imagination: Magic and Modernity in Urban England, 1780-1914* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁷ Malcolm Gaskill, "The Pursuit of Reality: Recent Research into the History of Witchcraft," *Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 1073.

⁸ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 304; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The Occult in Early Modern Europe: A Documentary History* (Basingstoke, 1999), 160.

⁹ Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁰ For example, Clark (*ibid.*, 82) notes that the minister, Richard Bernard, condemned jugglers alongside witchcraft, but it was for being "lewd and vain," and perhaps blasphemous, not because they were thought to be genuine [Richard Bernard, *A Guide for Grand-Jury Men*, (London, 1630), 92].

¹¹ Peter Lamont, "Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence," *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004): 906; Michael Mangan, *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring* (Bristol, 2007), 39.

¹² Scot, *Discoverie*, 174.

¹³ Brandon was the king's juggler until about 1540 [Philip Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge, 2005), 9], when Scot would have been two years old.

¹⁴ Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage*, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶ S. R[id], *The Art of Jugling, or legerdemaine* (London, 1612); [Vincent], *Hocus Pocus Junior*; Neve, *The Merry Companion*.

¹⁷ Thomas Ady, *A Candle in the Dark* (London, 1655), 169.

¹⁸ Ady, *Candle in the Dark*, 41.

¹⁹ Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 272.

²⁰ John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London, 1677), 61; Francis Hutchinson, *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* (London, 1718), 9.

²¹ My use of "frame" is based on Erving Goffman's notion of the term, which is similar to the notion of "schema," and which refers to how we define our experience at any given time (Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974). On its application to magic, see: Peter Lamont, "Magician as Conjuror: A Frame Analysis of Victorian Mediums," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 4 (2006): 131-142.

²² For example, magic props were made by Rob. Spooner of Achorn in the Long Walk between Christ Church and Lume-Hospital (J. M., *Sports and pastimes*, 26).

²³ Thomas Hill, *A Brief and Pleasant Treatise, Entitled Natural and Artificial Conclusions* (London, 1581); Bruno Roy, "The Household Encyclopedia as Magic Kit: Medieval Popular Interest in Pranks and Illusions," *Journal of Popular Culture* 14 (1980), 60-69; Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), 91.

²⁴ Jean Prevost, *Clever and Pleasant Inventions. Part One* (Seattle, 1998), 5-9.

²⁵ N. W. Bawcutt, "Michael Vincent, alias Hocus Pocus: A Travelling Entertainer of the Seventeenth Century," *Theatre Notebook* 54 (2000): 130-8; Clarke, *Annals*, 24; Edwin Dawes, "The Italian Court Conjuror Hieronymus Scotto: New Light on His Portrait in Wax," *Magic Circular* 87 (1993): 152.

²⁶ Ottokar Fischer, "Hieronymus Scotto: An Unknown Conjuror of the Renaissance," *The Sphinx* 36 (1937): 14-15.

²⁷ P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The Occult in Early Modern Europe: A Documentary History* (New York, 1999), 160~~1~~.

²⁸ Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or A Natural History in Ten Centuries* (London. 1670), 207.

²⁹ Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage*, 166.

³⁰ Louis B. Wright, "Juggling Tricks and Conjury on the English Stage before 1642," *Modern Philology*, 24 (1926-7): 269-84, 270, 283.

³¹ Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 28, 129, 319.

³² Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 248.

³³ *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, Translated with Introductions, Bibliography and Notes by Rev. Montague Summers* (London, 1928), 59.

³⁴ Ibid.; Nathanael Homes, *Daemonologie and Theologie* (London, 1650), p. 44.

³⁵ William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned So Farre Forth as It is Revealed in the Scriptures, and Manifest by True Experience* (Cambridge, 1608), 159.

³⁶ Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History* (London, 2009), 67.

³⁷ Scot, *Discoverie*, 79ff.

³⁸ Scot, *Discoverie*, 180; Ady, *Candle in the Dark*, 31.

³⁹ Webster, *Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 154-5.

⁴⁰ Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus, or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London, 1681), 39-43.

⁴¹ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 23.

⁴² Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 151-2.

⁴³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 195ff.

⁴⁴ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of the Witches. Translated by R. A. Scott*. Toronto, 1580/1995), 242.

⁴⁵ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, 4th edition* (1583), book 5, 548. *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or TAMO (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 12.09.14]

⁴⁶ P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Martin Del Rio: Investigations into Magic* (Manchester, 2000), 54.

⁴⁷ Philip Butterworth, "Brandon, Feats and Hocus Pocus: jugglers three," *Theatre Notebook* 57 (2003): 94.

⁴⁸ Scot, *Discoverie*, 74, 82.

⁴⁹ Butterworth, *Magic on the early English stage* 14-15.

⁵⁰ This was the view of Sir Richard Carew, though based on a second-hand account from his cousin, written more than forty years after the event (Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage*, 15).

⁵¹ His sources referred to the claim that jugglers might, in addition to performing tricks, also indulge in witchcraft (Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 304)

⁵² Max Maven, "I'll Build a Stairway to a Paradox," *Magic* 5 (1995): 23.

⁵³ Scot had justified his exposure of jugglers' secrets on the grounds that it was for the greater good (Scot, *Discoverie*, 182). Subsequent books, which plagiarized his section on magic tricks, also borrowed his justification, though they said little else about witchcraft itself (R[id], *The Art of Juggling*; [Vincent], *Hocus Pocus Junior*; Neve, *The Merry Companion*).

⁵⁴ Prevost, *Clever and Pleasant Inventions*, 8.

⁵⁵ William Hooper, *Rational Recreations, in which the principle of numbers and natural philosophy are clearly and copiously elucidated, by a series of easy, entertaining, interesting experiments* (London, 1774), preface; *Breslaw's Last Legacy* (London, 1784), ix-xi.

⁵⁶ Thomas Frost, *The Lives of the Conjurors* (London, 1876), 83, 102, 112-113, 133.

⁵⁷ Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester, 1999), 7.

⁵⁸ Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*. On natural magic, see: Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1830), 320; David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London, 1832); William Godwin, *Lives of the Necromancers* (London: 1834).

⁵⁹ Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2004), 74ff.

⁶⁰ Owen Davies, *Cunning-folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003), 53; Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (London, 1990).

⁶¹ P. Lamont, "Conjuring Images of India," *Social History* 32 (2007), 308-324; G. Jones, "Modern Magic and the War on Miracles in French Colonial Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52 (2010), 66-99.

⁶² Scott, *Letters on Demonology*, 379-80. Scott, despite his fondness for folklore, shared the view that witchcraft was primarily a thing of the past, and that this was a positive development (*ibid.*, 320).

⁶³ W. E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London, 1913), 104.

⁶⁴ Edwin A. Dawes, *The Great Illusionists* (Secaucus, 1979); James Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁶⁵ Lamont, "Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence."

⁶⁶ Colonel Stodare, *Fly-notes, or Conjuring Made Easy* (London, 1867), 5-6.

⁶⁷ Antonio Blitz, *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle* (San Francisco, 1871), 54, 86.

⁶⁸ Edwin Sachs, *Sleight of Hand* (London, 1885), 2.

⁶⁹ Bell, *The Magical Imagination*, 94.

⁷⁰ Frost, *The Lives of the Conjurors*, 60.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷² Arprey Vere, *Ancient and Modern Magic, with Explanations of Some of the Best Known Tricks Performed by Messrs Maskelyne and Cooke* (London, 1879), 81.

⁷³ Henry Ridgley Evans, *The Old and the New Magic* (Chicago, 1909), xviii.

⁷⁴ Evans, *The Old and the New Magic*, xvi; see also Albert A. Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions, Including Trick Photography* (New York, 1897), 6.

⁷⁵ Frost, *Lives of the Conjurors*, 82-102.

⁷⁶ Mangan, *Performing Dark Arts*, 36.

⁷⁷ Evans, *Old and New Magic*, 18.

⁷⁸ Clarke, *Annals*, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸¹ For example, according to both, the girl had torn the handkerchief “into pieces and immediately afterwards produced it whole and entire,” and she had done this “in the presence of a great company of noble spectators.” Richard Cumberland, “Account of Magic from the Old Christian Writers, with Several Anecdotes of Magicians, & C,” in L. T. Berguer, *The British Essayists, with Prefaces Biographical, Historical and Critical*, vol. 38 (London, 1823), 197-206.

⁸² P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witch Beliefs and Witch Trials in the Middle Ages: Documents and Readings* (London, 2011), 145-6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸⁴ Christopher, *Illustrated History*, 23; Gerlad Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (London, 1959), 91; Bouffard, *The Magicians Fight!* (Pomona, 2008), 28.

⁸⁵ Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris, 1587). At different points in the third book, Bodin describes him variously as “Des-eschelles” and “Trois-eschelles,” but it is obvious from the context that this is the same individual.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸⁷ Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 80-1.

⁸⁸ Cumberland, “Account of Magic,” 204.

⁸⁹ Christopher, *Illustrated History*, 23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹² C. H. Lea, *Materials towards a History of Witchcraft. Volume II*. Edited by A. C. Howland (New York, 1957), 493.

⁹³ Pietro Pomponazzi, *De Naturalium Effectuum Causis, sive de Incantatibus*. (Basel, 1520), 59-61. Pomponazzi mentions Reatius during a discussion of a case of the ‘moving sieve’ (cribrum moto). This was a form of magical divination, in which a sieve was suspended on shears, and would turn in response to questions being asked (Scot, *Discoverie*, 149). Pomponazzi is considering that the sorcerer could use deception to move the sieve without being noticed, and Reatius is mentioned as an example of someone who practiced such deception, and was punished for it. My thanks to John Forrester for his assistance in translating, and discussing, the relevant passage.

⁹⁴ Indeed, even references that suggest confusion need to be treated with caution. For example, one writer claimed that a man who performed some tricks was accused by the audience of being a witch, and had to reveal how they were done to avoid being thrown out of a window. However, this was in a book containing practical jokes and tricks for the amusement of schoolboys, which also explained how to steal a cloak (and then, if Satan betrays you, how to lie before a magistrate) [J. M., *Sports and pastimes, or Sport for the city and Pastime for the Country* (London, 1676), 21-27]. Clearly, his young readers were not supposed to take this seriously. Indeed, he would hardly have taught them how to perform tricks, if this was likely to lead to them being accused of witchcraft.

⁹⁵ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1988); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004); Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago, 1997).

⁹⁶ For an overview see: Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006): 692-716.

⁹⁷ Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 93, 179.

⁹⁸ Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge, 2002), 14, 27.

⁹⁹ Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment," 713.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 714; Graham M. Jones, "Modern Magic," 68.

¹⁰¹ Jones, "Modern Magic," 95.

¹⁰² During, *Modern Enchantments*, 44-45.

¹⁰³ During's sources, not surprisingly, include Frost, Evans, Clarke and Christopher.

¹⁰⁴ During, *Modern Enchantments*, 3, 6, 7, 20, 39.

¹⁰⁵ L. A. Seneca, *Moral Epistles*. Translated by Richard M. Gunmere. *The Loeb Classical Library*. 3 vols. Volume I. Cambridge, 1917), 295.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Tallefer, "Conjurers around the Mediterranean Basin", *Gibecière*, 10, 1 (2015): 53-100, 85).

¹⁰⁷ Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, 207.

¹⁰⁸ During, *Modern Enchantments*, 57.

¹⁰⁹ James VI, King of Scotland, *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Diaologue, Divided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh, 1597), 22.

¹¹⁰ This was between 1594 and 1612 [D. Cook and F. P. Wilson, (eds.), *Malone Society. Collections VI: Dramatic Records in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber 1558-1642* (Oxford, 1961).

¹¹¹ Dawes, "Italian Court Conjuror," 152.

¹¹² Darwin Ortiz, *Strong Magic: Creative Showmanship for the Close-Up Magician*. Silver Spring, 1994), 25-6; Jamy Ian Swiss, *Shattering Illusions* (Seattle, 2002), 21; Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs*, 45.

¹¹³ Cook, *The Arts of Deception*; During, *Modern Enchantments*; Jim Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant* (New York, 2003).

¹¹⁴ Lamont, "Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence"; Lamont, "Conjuring Images of India"; Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant*, 292-3.

¹¹⁵ Mangan, *Dark Arts*, 174-180; Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant*, 259-260.

¹¹⁶ Peter Lamont, *A Particular Kind of Wonder: The Experience of Magic Past and Present* (forthcoming).

¹¹⁷ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, 1994); Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*.

¹¹⁸ On the persistence of such themes, see: Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs*.

¹¹⁹ Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage*, 163.

¹²⁰ Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs*, 245.